

FREDDY CORBIN

Oakland tattoo artist.
Shot for Inked Magazine.



LIFESTYLE
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JAY WATSON SHOOTS THE CRAZY SHIT

INTERVIEW BY JAMIE WATSON PHOTOGRAPHS BY JAY WATSON

California photographer Jay Watson specializes in lifestyle and environmental portraits of people on location. His work involves shooting for editorial, advertising, clothing, music, entertainment, industrial, and corporate clients. *Elemental Magazine* once wrote “he shoots the crazy shit,” and an early issue of *Garage Magazine* said “Jay came to California to raise free range artichokes.” Some of these things are true.

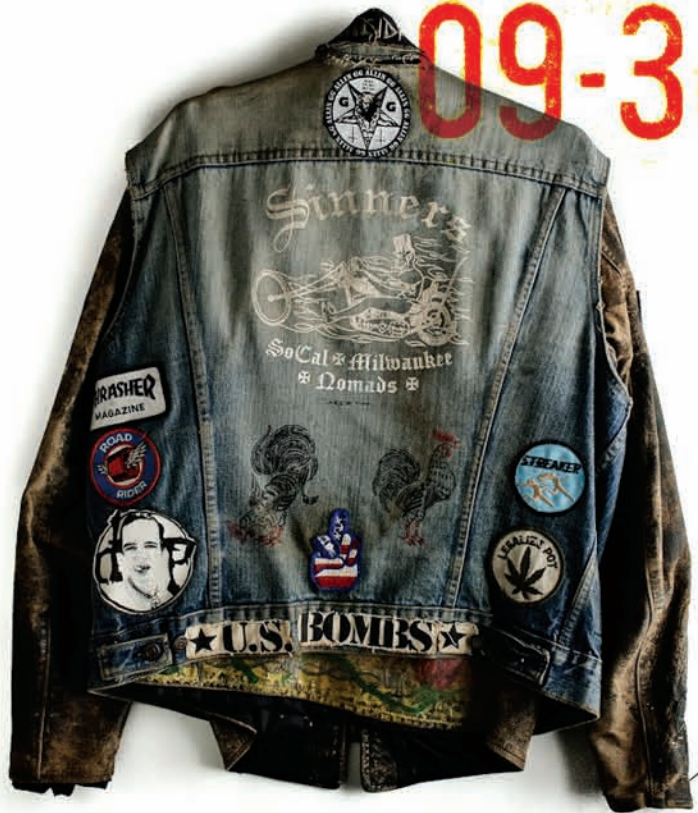
You were raised in Baltimore, Maryland. What did you bring to California's table?

I brought a plastic toy camera, a humidor filled with some cigars, 6 bungee cords, an Alpine car stereo, and a Biz Markie CD. It was all stolen the first week I moved to the Bay Area along with some other stuff. I guess it was a toll I had to pay, but nobody told me about it before I got here. They let me keep my Baltimore accent and blue collar work ethic. I'll never shake those things. In reality I came with a desire to just find my own way, but now I feel the ability to contribute. I have so much respect for this place and the weight of it is heavy. I hope someday California will say that I rose to the occasion.

What was the first thing you photographed when you arrived to California in 1999?

The “Welcome to California” sign. I pulled over right after the border inspectors check incoming vehicles carrying fruit and vegetables. I shot the sign with a Polaroid Land camera. Then I got distracted in Joshua Tree and stayed there an extra day to shoot and drink up the California desert. I also hit the Dinosaurs at Cabazon with the toy camera.

{Above} Self Portraits
JAY WATSON



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What is your dream job? What was your dream job 10 years ago? 10 years ago my dream assignments were to shoot photo essays for mags like The Fader, YRB, The Face. Now my dream job would be to pitch my own ideas and shoot multi media pieces for both online and print publications. I love shooting assignment work but I want my future to include collaborating, producing my own content, and licensing the usage.

Do you have a dream piece of equipment? Na. I don't really dream about equipment. I make due.

Where do you want to surf that you've never been? Pavones in Costa Rica. I would love to ride what is considered to be one of the world's longest lefts. I also don't feel like I am a true California surfer yet since I have not made a trip to Baja Mexico. That needs to happen first.

Where do you want to photograph that you've never been? I am sure there are amazing places to shoot 3 hours from my house that I have not been to yet, but I would like to shoot in Africa, Alaska and Japan.

Who do you want to photograph? Right now I want to keep paying homage to the people who shaped the California culture that I idolized growing up. This includes a list of some pro skaters from the 80s, but I also want to include some of the early mountain bike builders, BMX freestyle riders, and surfers. I'd also like to get some of the up and coming groms who are changing things now. The list is too long, not to mention things I want to do outside of my portrait work.

{Above}

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What was your favorite photo assignment in college?

The best assignments were from specific themes or when we were allowed to shoot our own concepts. The UMBC photography instructors were very conceptual so the student work was either more personal, political, or social compared to commercial work. It was never about shooting a specific person with a certain type of light. We certainly needed more of those skills, but I really liked working conceptually. Anyone can learn technique but not everyone studies conceptualism so it really forces you to think about ideas. It also has a double edged sword. The root of post-modern theory is that there are no more original ideas. That really messed with my head. It only took a decade for me to get over it.

What were the most important things you learned on set as a photographer's assistant?

The most important thing I learned was lighting. This included anything from lighting a person at a steel mill, model in the studio, or a plate of food in a restaurant. Assisting was my grad school. I saw photographers gain and lose jobs for reasons that were never explained over details that had nothing to do with photography. Like available drinks, studio location, choice of assistant, crew, and catering. If the client likes the images but hates the studio or food, I might not get rehired. Needless to say, another thing I learned was how to keep my mouth shut.

On Wednesday evenings you go to Lake Cunningham skate park. You skate with guys that you used to read about in magazines as a teenager. What has this been like for you?

It is like getting to shoot lay ups with Patrick Ewing. You can't hang on the field with pros in any other sport except skating. It was kind of intimidating at first. Lake Cunningham is one of the biggest parks in the state so it took a while to get used to riding the really big stuff. Those guys are at a different level but we are all there to have fun and enjoy the camaraderie. We skate until 10 at night under the lights with vintage punk music playing over the PA system. It is as much fun riding now as it was 20 years ago. It pays the bills here (first to chest).

You've mentioned that skate parks tend to be friendlier than surf breaks. Can you explain a little?

I met more people skating after 6 months than I had surfing in California for 5 years. The Wednesday night sessions at Lake Cunningham might be more special than other places. Someone said Caballero really helped bring the good vibe to that park. Cab has been a pro since 1979 and has invented as many tricks as anyone, but he is the first one to congratulate anyone who makes a new first trick no matter how difficult or easy it may seem. The Pacifica guys are similar. We are all cheering for each other. The water is just so much more crowded. I think there are 10 times more surfers than skatepark riders. Everyone is paddling to get their own waves and to stay out of each other's way. It is all business.

What is your favorite skate trick and what skate trick are you working on now?

I don't have many tricks. I just work on my speed, lines, and grinds. Currently working on backside airs and hope to get back to inverts. I have a long way to go. I love seeing a lien air or Madonna in the skull bowl at Lake Cunningham. A proper frontside rock and roll looks good on a wall of any size.

Have you ever wanted to collaborate with another artist?

Yes. I have collaborated with Brian Bounds on a few projects. We did a back and forth piece together from one of my portraits of tattoo artist Freddy Corbin. Currently I am helping him out with one of his book projects that he is working on with pro skater Jason Jessee. Collaborating can really help to push an idea to a different level. It brings spontaneity and surprise. All of which could lead to new ideas.

As a huge fan of noir, do you think these films will end up influencing your work?

Maybe not in my still photography but definitely when I start shooting video. The camera work back then was outstanding and I like how it is 10th Annual Tim Brauch Memorial Contestall 100% real without CGI and special effects.

TAKE SNAPSHOTS

SLIDE BODAINS OUT



**DUANE
PETERS IS
MORE
HARDCORE
THAN YOU.**

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DUANE PETERS

10th Annual Tim Brauch Memorial Contest



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The action, motion, and lighting from film noir movies are more interesting to me than doing a period piece imitating that era. I would like to do a hybrid film noir concept set in modern times shot in black and white with Japanese gangsters. I have a few good fight scenes in my head. It could take years to develop those skills for that type of cinematography but I am up for it.

You shot the Mavericks contest this year from the media boat. What was it like to see a wipeout up close?

Well we were not that close. Shooting it and riding it are 2 different things. I was really interested in seeing how long they would stay under during a wipeout. I counted a few times and it would take about 20 seconds for some of the guys to break the surface. That seemed normal, but I was surprised they were not pushed more from the waves towards shore. They would pop up about 20-50 yards away from their wipeout. I read that Ion Banner had a bloody nose, a bruised right eye, and was dizzy after his wipeout in heat 1. Sounds more like a street fight.

At Mavericks, when waves are that large, did you notice if it's possible for a surfer to show "style"?

On video I have seen Peter Mel cut it up at Mavericks. Everyone knows how good he is, but I still think he is underrated. As for the style I witnessed that day, it came from Anthony Tashnick. He is the only one I saw reach down to grab a rail and go pig-dog at the end of wave to cut back in order to pick up some speed. It looked awesome to see that on such a big wave. All the guys have some type of style. Shane Desmond and Dave Wassell are more bombers than carvers. To me that is also style. It is also maybe not fair to judge based on one contest. Some very good surfers didn't even advance out of their heat.



Has our current economy taught you anything new about the photo industry and what positive experience may have come out as a result?

The current photo industry is very much in the air and there are not that many answers to all the questions we have. The lessons I have learned is that I can't look to the industry anymore. The answers need to come from within. The economy is supposedly hurting but technology is not stopping and media is a bigger part of our lives now than ever. It is up to me to find a market for my work and not the other way around.

You have taught photography workshops and online courses. What is the number one thing you try to impart to your students?

Slow down and don't rush. Nobody ever said photography was supposed to be fast, inexpensive, and easy to master. Those are all

untrue assumptions. There are some people who dedicate their whole lives to photography. It effects where they live, what they do with their time, and it effects their relationships. If this is something you want to be good at then make sure your efforts count. Make it worthy of your time and don't rush. If it takes you 1 hour to make a PhotoShop selection, 6 hours to light something, or 2 days to find the right loction then who cares. It is all part of the craft. Find a way to enjoy that time and be good at it.

Your life and photography are so intertwined. Are there any life lessons that you have learned from photography?

Yes. Have integrity in everything you do and try not to sweat the small stuff that can crush your spirit. There is always a bigger picture.

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